

Danse Bohème (Gypsy Song), from the Opera “Carmen” (Suite No. 2)
(1875)
Georges Bizet (1838 – 1875)

Today, “Carmen” is among the world’s favorite operas, but its première was an utter disaster. The cast includes no gods, nobles, or philosophers, but common people – factory girls, gypsies, smugglers; little wonder the public found the story and characters offensive, even vulgar. Quite simply, the public was unprepared for this kind of verismo, in which an overtly sexual heroine is brutally murdered onstage by a swaggering, egocentric toreador, whom the heroine has taunted beyond endurance. The highly original score evokes brilliant images of Spain and Spanish life. Had people realized it, this was the beginning of the era of verismo operas, typified by later works by such composers as Puccini, Leoncavallo, and Mascagni.

The Gypsy Song begins softly and seductively, and builds to a stunning climax.